

## Chapter 6

### Two Lessons

(c. 200 B.C.E.)

#### The Buddha

#### 1 Introduction

2 In ancient India, Prince Siddhartha Gautama fled his comfortable life and eventually became an ascetic.  
3 Unlike the Mahavira, who found victory over karma in severe self-denial and total nonviolence, Prince  
4 Gautama found only severe disquiet. The ascetic life offered him no enlightenment as to how one might  
5 escape the sorrows of mortal existence. After abandoning extreme asceticism, Gautama achieved  
6 Enlightenment in a flash while meditating under a sacred pipal tree. He was now the Buddha, the  
7 Enlightened One.

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9 Legend tells us he then proceeded to share the way to Enlightenment, which he termed the *Middle Path*,  
10 by preaching a sermon in a deer park at Benares in northeastern India to five ascetics, who became his  
11 first disciples. Buddhists refer to that initial sermon as "Setting in Motion the Wheel of the Law", which  
12 means that the Buddha had embarked on a journey (turning the wheel) on behalf of the Law of  
13 Righteousness (dharma).

14  
15 Our first text is a reconstruction of that sermon. The second document is a dialogue between the Buddha  
16 and one of his disciples. Known as "The Lesson on Questions That Tend Not to Edification", it deals with  
17 issues on which the Buddha refused to speculate.

#### 18 Questions to Consider

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- 20 • According to Buddha, why do human beings suffer? How can suffering be avoided?
  - 21 • What kinds of questions did Buddha refuse to answer? Why?

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#### 22 SETTING IN MOTION THE WHEEL OF THE LAW

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26 And the Blessed One thus addressed the five Bhikkhus. "There are two extremes, O Bhikkhus, which he  
27 who has given up the world ought to avoid. What are these two extremes? A life given to pleasures,  
28 devoted to pleasures and lusts: this is degrading, sensual, vulgar, ignoble, and profitless; and a life given  
29 to mortifications: this is painful, ignoble, and profitless. By avoiding these two extremes, O Bhikkhus, the  
30 Tathagata has gained the knowledge of the Middle Path which leads to insight, which leads to wisdom,  
31 which conduces to calm, to knowledge, to the Sambodhi, to Nirvana.

32  
33 "Which, O Bhikkhus, is this Middle Path the knowledge of which the Tathagata has gained, which leads  
34 to insight, which leads to wisdom, which conduces to calm, to knowledge, to the Sambodhi, to Nirvana?  
35 It is the Holy Eightfold Path, namely, Right Belief, Right Aspiration, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right  
36 Means of Livelihood, Right Endeavor, Right Memory, Right Meditation. This, O Bhikkhus, is the Middle  
37 Path the knowledge of which the Tathagata has gained, which leads to insight, which leads to wisdom,  
38 which conduces to calm, to knowledge, to the Sambodhi, to Nirvana.

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40 "This, O Bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of Suffering: Birth is suffering; decay is suffering; illness is  
41 suffering; death is suffering. Presence of objects we hate, is suffering; Separation from objects we love, is  
42 suffering; not to obtain what we desire, is suffering. Briefly, ... clinging to existence is suffering.

1  
2 "This, O Bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the Cause of suffering: Thirst, that leads to rebirth, accompanied  
3 by pleasure and lust, finding its delight here and there. This thirst is threefold, namely, thirst for pleasure,  
4 thirst for existence, thirst for prosperity.

5  
6 "This, O Bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the Cessation of suffering: it ceases with the complete cessation  
7 of this thirst, -- a cessation which consists in the absence of every passion -- with the abandoning of this  
8 thirst, with the doing away with it, with the deliverance from it, with the destruction of desire.

9  
10 "This, O Bhikkhus, is the Noble Truth of the Path which leads to the cessation of suffering: that Holy  
11 Eightfold Path, that is to say, Right Belief, Right Aspiration, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Means  
12 of Livelihood, Right Endeavor, Right Memory, Right Meditation....

13  
14 "As long, O Bhikkhus, as I did not possess with perfect purity this true knowledge and insight into these  
15 four Noble Truths ... so long, O Bhikkhus, I knew that I had not yet obtained the highest, absolute  
16 Sambodhi in the world of men and gods....

17  
18 "But since I possessed, O Bhikkhus, with perfect purity this true knowledge and insight into these four  
19 Noble Truths ... then I knew, O Bhikkhus, that I had obtained the highest, universal Sambodhi....

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21 "And this knowledge and insight arose in my mind: The emancipation of my mind cannot be lost; this is  
22 my last birth; hence I shall not be born again!"

## 23 24 ***QUESTIONS THAT TEND NOT TO EDIFICATION***

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26 Thus I have heard.

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28 On certain occasion the Blessed One was dwelling at Savatthi in Jetavana monastery in Anathapindikas  
29 Park. Now it happened to the venerable Malunkyaputta, being in seclusion and plunged in meditation, that  
30 a consideration presented itself to his mind as follows:

31  
32 "These theories that the Blessed One has left unexplained, has set aside and rejected -- that the world is  
33 eternal, that the world is not eternal, that the world is finite, that the world is infinite, that the soul and the  
34 body are identical, that the soul is one thing and the body another, that the saint exists after death, that the  
35 saint does not exist after death, that the saint both exists and does not exist after death, that the saint  
36 neither exists nor does not exist after death -- these the Blessed One does not explain to me. And the fact  
37 that the Blessed One does not explain them to me does not please me nor suit me. Therefore I will draw  
38 near to the Blessed One and inquire of him concerning this matter. If the Blessed One will explain them to  
39 me, ... I will lead the religious life under the Blessed One. If the Blessed One will not explain them to me,  
40 ... I will abandon religious training and return to the lower life of a layman."

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42 Then the venerable Malunkyaputta arose in the evening from his seclusion, and drew near to where the  
43 Blessed One was; and having drawn near and greeted the Blessed One, he sat down respectfully at one  
44 side. And seated respectfully at one side, the venerable Malunkyaputta spoke to the Blessed One as  
45 follows:

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47 "Reverend Sir, it happened to me, as I was just now in seclusion and plunged in meditation, that a  
48 consideration presented itself to my mind, as follows: "These theories that the Blessed One has left  
49 unexplained, has set aside and rejected -- that the world is eternal, that the world is not eternal ... that the  
50 saint neither exists nor does not exist after death -- these the Blessed One does not explain to me. And the  
51 fact that the Blessed One does not explain them to me does not please me nor suit me. I will draw near to

1 the Blessed One and inquire of him concerning this matter. If the Blessed One will explain to me, either  
2 that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal ... or that the saint neither exists nor does not exist  
3 after death, in that case I will lead the religious life under the Blessed One. If the Blessed One will not  
4 explain to me, either that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal ... or that the saint neither  
5 exists nor does not exist after death, in that case I will abandon religious training and return to the lower  
6 life of a layman.'

7  
8 "If the Blessed One knows that the world is eternal, let the Blessed One explain to me that the world is  
9 eternal; if the Blessed One knows that the world is not eternal, let the Blessed One explain to me that the  
10 world is not eternal. If the Blessed One does not know either that the world is eternal or that the world is  
11 not eternal, the only upright thing for one who does not know, or who has not that insight, is to say, 'I do  
12 not know; I have not that insight.'"

13  
14 "Pray Malunkyaputta, did I ever say to you, 'Come, Malunkyaputta, lead the religious life under me, and I  
15 will explain to you either that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal ... or that the saint  
16 neither exists nor does not exist after death?'"

17  
18 "No, indeed, Reverend Sir."

19  
20 "Or did you ever say to me, 'Reverend Sir, I will lead the religious life under the Blessed One, on  
21 condition that the Blessed One explain to me either that the world is eternal, or that the world is not  
22 eternal ... or that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death?'"

23  
24 "No, indeed, Reverend Sir...."

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26 "That being the case, vain man, whom are you so angrily denouncing?"

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28 "Malunkyaputta, any one who should say, 'I will not lead the religious life under the Blessed One until the  
29 Blessed One shall explain to me either that the world is eternal. Or that the world is not eternal ... or that  
30 the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death'; -- that person would die, Malunkyaputta, before the  
31 Tathagata had ever explained this to him.

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33 "It is as if, Malunkyaputta, a man had been wounded by an arrow thickly smeared with poison, and his  
34 friends and companions, his relatives and kinsfolk, were to procure for him a physician or surgeon; and  
35 the sick man were to say, 'I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learned whether the man who  
36 wounded me belonged to the warrior caste, or to the Brahmin caste, or to the agricultural caste, or to the  
37 menial caste.'

38  
39 "Or again he were to say, 'I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learned the name of the man  
40 who wounded me, and to what clan he belongs.'

41  
42 "Or again he were to say, 'I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learned whether the man who  
43 wounded me was tall, or short, or of the middle height.'

44  
45 "Or again he were to say, 'I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learned whether the man who  
46 wounded me was black, or dusky, or of a yellow skin.'

47  
48 "Or again he were to say, 'I will not have this arrow taken out until I have learned whether the man who  
49 wounded me was from this or that village, or town, or city.' ...

50  
51 [Many similar possibilities are mentioned.]

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2 "That man would die, Malunkya-putta, without ever having learned this.  
3

4 "In exactly the same way, Malunkya-putta, any one who should say, 'I will not lead the religious life under  
5 the Blessed One until the Blessed One shall explain to me either that the world is eternal, or that the world  
6 is not eternal ... or that the saint neither exists nor does not exist after death'; -- that person would die,  
7 Malunkya-putta, before the Tathagata had ever explained this to him.  
8

9 "The religious life, Malunkya-putta, does not depend on the dogma that the world is eternal; nor does the  
10 religious life, Malunkya-putta, depend on the dogma that the world is not eternal. Whether the dogma  
11 obtain, Malunkya-putta, that the world is eternal, or that the world is not eternal, there still remain birth,  
12 old age, death, sorrow, lamentation, misery, grief, and despair, for the extinction of which in the present  
13 life I am prescribing....  
14

15 "Accordingly, Malunkya-putta, bear always in mind what it is that I have not explained, and what it is that  
16 I have explained. And what, Malunkya-putta, have I not explained? I have not explained, Malunkya-putta,  
17 that the world is eternal; I have not explained that the world is not eternal; I have not explained that the  
18 world is finite; I have not explained that the world is infinite; I have not explained that the soul and the  
19 body are identical; I have not explained that the soul is one thing and the body another; I have not  
20 explained that the saint exists after death; I have not explained that the saint does not exist after death; I  
21 have not explained that the saint both exists and does not exist after death; I have not explained that the  
22 saint neither exists nor does not exist after death. And why, Malunkya-putta, have I not explained this?  
23 Because, Malunkya-putta, this profits not, nor has to do with the fundamentals of religion, nor tends to  
24 aversion, absence of passion, cessation, quiescence, the supernatural faculties, supreme wisdom, and  
25 Nirvana; therefore I have not explained it.  
26

27 "And what, Malunkya-putta, have I explained? Misery, Malunkya-putta, have I explained; the origin of  
28 misery have I explained; the cessation of misery have I explained; and the path leading to the cessation of  
29 misery have I explained. And why, Malunkya-putta, have I explained this? Because, Malunkya-putta, this  
30 does profit, has to do with the fundamentals of religion, and tends to aversion, absence of passion,  
31 cessation, quiescence, knowledge, supreme wisdom, and Nirvana; therefore have I explained it.  
32 Accordingly, Malunkya-putta, bear always in mind what it is that I have not explained, and what it is that I  
33 have explained."  
34

35 Thus the Blessed One spoke and, delighted, the venerable Malunkya-putta applauded the speech of the  
36 Blessed One.